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Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

Review of food additives and sweeteners legislation 2006

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Report Highlights:

Directive 2006/52/EC amends two directives on food additives and sweeteners. The proposed amendments include stricter requirements for nitrites and nitrates in meat. Furthermore, the use of seven new food additives is allowed and the permission to use certain other additives is extended reflecting technical developments since the adoption of the original EU food additives legislation. These new approvals are also of importance for foods exported to the EU. Member States have to permit the products complying with the new directive by February 15, 2008.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
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[E3]

Introduction

Directive 95/2/EC sets out a list of authorized food additives other than colors and sweeteners (the so-called miscellaneous food additives list), the foodstuffs in which they may be used and their conditions of use. It is now amended in the light of recent technical scientific developments. For the same reason, Directive 94/35/EC on sweeteners for use in foodstuffs is amended as well by this new Directive.

The changes can be classified in three main categories:

- New rules for nitrites and nitrates in meat
- New and extended authorizations
- Ban on dangerous gelling agents

New rules for nitrites and nitrates in meat

Nitrosamines are formed from nitrates and nitrites and are carcinogenic. The level of nitrosamines will be kept as low as possible by lowering the levels of nitrites and nitrates added to food.

However, specific provisions exist for some traditional meat products that rely on certain technological processes. In that case, a description of the production process is included, so that these products can be easily recognized and defined.

New and extended authorizations

Seven new additives are being authorized:

Erythritol, Soybean hemicellulose, ethyl cellulose, hexylresorcinols, tertiary butyl hydroquinone (TBHQ), pullulan and starch aluminium octenyl succinate.

These additives are added to the annexes of Directive 95/2/EC. Erythritol is also used for sweetening purposes and is added to the annex of Directive 94/35/EC as well.

The authorizations of several other additives have also been extended to allow their use in a wider range of foods:

- sodium hydrogen carbonate in sour milk cheese
- sorbates and benzoates in crustaceans
- silicon dioxide as a carrier
- additives in traditional Hungarian products
- sulphites in cooked crustaceans, table grapes and lychees

Ban on dangerous gelling agents

The ban on the use of certain gelling agents in jelly mini cups will be formalized since they are identified as a choking risk because of their consistency, shape and form.

The use of the following substances is banned in jelly mini-cups:

- alginic acid (E400)
- sodium alginate (E401)
- potassium alginate (E402)
- ammonium alginate (E403)
- calcium alginate (E404)
- agar (E406)
- carrageenan (E407)
- processed eucheima seaweed (E407a)
- locust bean gum (E410)
- guar gum (E412)
- tragacanth (E413)
- acacia gum (E414)
- xanthan gum (E415)
- tara gum (E417)

- gellan gum (E418)
- pectin (E440)

Other changes

- The authorization for the use of E216 propyl p-hydroxybenzoate and its sodium salt E217 sodium propyl p-hydroxybenzoate is withdrawn
- Every reference made to "weaning foods" is replaced by a reference to "processed cereal-based foods and baby foods".
- The term "dietary food supplements" is replaced by "food supplements as defined in Directive 2002/46/EC"
- Dietetic foods intended for special medical purposes is replaced by a reference to "dietary foods for special medical purposes as defined in Directive 1999/21/EC".
- The definition of "carriers" is slightly rephrased

Implementation in the Member States

The current amendment to the food additives legislation is written in the form of a Directive and thus needs to be implemented in Member States legislation. The Member States have to permit trade and the use of products complying with this Directive by February 15, 2008. The trade in and the use of products that don't comply with this Directive has to be prohibited as from August 15, 2008.

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